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C O N F I D E N T I A L ALGIERS 001867

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: UPDATE ON ALGERIANS SCHEDULED FOR RELEASE FROM GUANTANAMO

REF: ALGIERS 1438

Classified By: Ambassador Richard W. Erdman,
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) In an August 31 meeting on other issues, Ambassador pressed FM Bedjaoui for an early, favorable response conveying Algeria's readiness to accept the return of Algerian nationals scheduled for release from Guantanamo. Ambassador explained that the Embassy had raised this issue with the Ministry on several occasions and that some of these cases had dragged on for several months with no reply. The response we always received was that the Algerian citizenship of these individuals had to be confirmed before Algeria could agree to receive them.

¶2. (C) Ambassador said we fully understood the need to verify the citizenship of those involved and had already provided information that should have enabled the GOA to confirm their citizenship by now. But we have seen no sign that follow-up action was being taken. As an international jurist and judge, the Foreign Minister knew better than he (the Ambassador) the international legal obligations of a state to accept its own citizens. The delay was a bit odd, Ambassador added, because Bedjaoui's predecessor, former FM Belkhadem, had raised Guantanamo detention cases with Secretary Powell during his November 2003 visit to Algiers. It was important to act now, and positively, in order to avoid problems down the line.

¶3. (C) Bedjaoui thanked Ambassador for bringing this issue to his attention and readily acknowledged the international legal obligation of states to accept their own citizens. Noting he had not been aware of the issue, he undertook to ask his staff for all the data. " I have to face this problem very soon. I don't want a bad result." Guantanamo, he added, was a "heavy burden" for Algeria. On the one hand, Algeria didn't like Guantanamo. But on the other hand, it wasn't anxious to take these people back. "We have to be consistent," he said, assuring that Algeria would of course respect its international legal obligations.

ERDMAN